

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Gilbert Grosvenor, February 3, 1909

At the date of this letter I had five children and a sixth on the way. Our expenses were so great that I needed much more money than I got from my articles. My Board of Trustees said if I would give all my thought and time to the NGS and Magazine they would arrange that my salary would be increased as I increased the membership of the Society.

Writing was very hard for me. I enjoyed being an editor and also I enjoyed getting members and creating a kind of magazine never before attempted. I believed the creation of a great educational institution would be very worthwhile and I realized even then the possibilities ahead for the NGS. Also I realized no one else could develop the vision I had. Mr. Bell thought anyone could fill the pages of a magazine. Anyone could fill pages. But only a very astute man could choose things that would sell a Geographic Magazine. Five years later AGB was calling me a GENIUS.

GHG February 9, 1909

Beinn Bhreagh, near Baddeck, Nova Scotia. See page 2 & 3 February 3, 1909. Mr. Gilbert H. Grosvenor, 1328 18th St., Washington, D. C. Dear Bert:

Many thanks for your note of January 22 enclosing the Minutes of the Board of Managers of the National Geographic Society, January 20, 1909.

I congratulate you upon the sliding rate basis upon which your salary has been fixed and hope that the salary will continue to slide upwards as there is every reason to expect.

That was a very nice letter you wrote to Mabel and she has been much touched by it. I also am pleased for it breathes a spirit of optimism (for which you have not been celebrated in the past!). It is indeed a great pleasure to have you speak so hopefully and

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pleasantly of your work. You have been steadily climbing the ladder of success and I hope and trust that you will not again think of going down to the bottom and starting all over again on a ranch in the West!

Mabel had a narrow escape from a very serious accident on Monday last. She slipped on the ice at the Hall and came down directly on her face. I was afraid, at first, that she might have struck her head on the stone steps but she was not unconscious and seems to have received no concussion. She fell fairly upon her nose but fortunately it does not seem to have been broken and the damage received is nothing worse than a bad bruise involving one side of the face. Her appearance is so changed that you would hardly recognise her but Miss Cadel assures us that she will be all right in a day or two. It certainly was a narrow escape.

I have so many letters to write and so much work in connection with the Bulletin etc. that I cannot write to you as fully as I should like concerning the magazine. The only suggestions I have to offer are those you already know—

- (1) Prompt appearance upon time, and
- (2) Some connection between illustrations and text.

You have a high standard of excellence to keep up and it is difficult to suggest improvements. I am sorry that you don't seem to be following out the plan you started last year of taking advantage of the opportunity you possess in Washington of being the interpreter to the public of the work of the Government Departments. I think it would be well worth your consideration making that a specialty, either for the magazine or for yourself personally. You have the good will of all the Departments and can obtain material from them easily that others would find difficult in securing. Your outside articles were admirably written and attracted great attention to you personally as a writer of promise. It is a great pity, I think, that you don't continue writing articles on your own account. You were making a name for yourself, why not continue in this line of work. The Century Magazine

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and other magazines would only be too glad to get anything from your pen and everything that you can do in this way adds to your personal reputation. Of course the same thing would happen if you wrote articles for your own magazine under your own name but this you don't seem to do so that there is little in the magazine to bring you personally before the public. Of course I know you say you have no time to write but it is always the busy man who has the most time, and it is a pity that you don't have more practise in ready writing. The practise would be good for you as an editor and good for you as a man. I would certainly recommend you to write more and hand over to subordinates as much as possible of the editorial details of your work. Of course you can't hand over the selection of illustrations; in that matter you stand at the head of the profession I think. There is no other magazine that has so many of and such good and interesting illustrations as the National Geographic Magazine. In a word my recommendation to you is

WRITE Yours sincerely, Your loving father Alexander Graham Bell